**AUGUST/SEPTEMBER**

***Clarify “What is a professional learning community.”***

**“The process of creating a professional learning community is inherently dynamic and inefficient, and those who think that they can reduce it to a recipe for success are bound to be frustrated. “ DuFour & Eaker**

***The term professional learning communities “has become so commonplace and has been used so ambiguously to describe any loose coupling of individuals who share a common interest in education that it is in danger of losing all meaning.”***

**DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many**

**As Michael Fullen has observed, “Terms travel well, but the underlying *conceptualization and thinking* do not.”**

* **Review/continue to build shared knowledge of PLC characteristics and its links to research on effective schooling practices**
* **Build shared knowledge of the current reality of MCPS and your school**
* **Develop the administrative leadership team as a guiding coalition**
* **Establish common vocabulary**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Assuming that just because *I* understand or that everyone has read PLC books or attended PLC workshops, *everyone* understands**
* **Not understanding how district initiatives, particularly PLC practices, fit or connect; a lack of conceptualization about the big picture**
* **Settling for PLC lite: doing bits and pieces of the work of professional learning communities**

***Things to Do***

* **Build shared knowledge of PLC characteristics and its links to research on effective schooling practices**
* **Build shared knowledge of the current reality in our district/school.**
* **Develop a guiding coalition.**
* **Establish a common vocabulary.**
* **Have continuous professional development specifically focused on PLCs**
* **Send frequent e-mails district wide to explain the importance of particular PLC concepts and how they fit with district initiatives**
* **Purchase resources—books, videos**
* **Have broad attendance at PLC workshops and activities**
* **Develop a districtwide PLC newsletter**
* **Familiarize everyone with and frequently used** [**www.allthingsplc.info**](http://www.allthingsplc.info)
* **Communicate, communicate, communicate**
* **Clear up misunderstandings immediately and *in writing***
* **Practice…DRIP….DRIP….DRIP**
* **Practice…How hard… How much…. How fast**

***Why Establish a Professional Learning Community?***

**“To be effective, leadership has to in part “be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens people’s intrinsic commitment, which is none other than the mobilizing of everyone’s sense of moral purpose.” Michael Fullen**

**The fundamental purpose of a school or school district that functions as a professional learning community is to ensure high levels of learning for all—students and adults alike.**

**Answer why do we exist?**

* **Articulates a moral purpose.**
* **Commit to ensuring high levels of learning for all—students and adults alike.**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Viewing professional learning communities as “just one more thing to do”**
* **Confusing “becoming a professional learning community” with the mission of “ensuring high levels of learning for all—both students and adults”**
* **Developing the attitude: “We already do this PLC stuff. Working in teams isn’t new to us.”**
* **Confusing a written mission statement with taking action.**

***Things to Do***

* **Articulate a moral purpose.**
* **Commit to ensuring high levels of learning for all—students and adults alike.**
* **Constantly and consistently remind people of why we are doing this work—especially in writing.**
* **Publicly recognize and celebrate incremental learning gains.**

**OCTOBER**

***Build the foundation for a professional learning community.***

**“Engaging staff members in a dialogue to reaffirm their mission can be an important step in the improvement process, but transforming schools also requires that educators become clear about the vision, values (that is collective commitments), and goals that drive the daily workings of the school.”**

**DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many**

* **Mission—Develop a clear understanding or our core purpose.**
* **Vision—Describe the district/school we hope to become and what it would look like if we really meant it.**
* **Collective Commitments—Articulate attitudes, behaviors, and commitments we must demonstrate in order to advance our vision.**
* **Goals—Determine first steps, short term achievable goals, and long-term stretch goals.**

***Possible Bumps***

* **View developing mission, vision, commitments, and goals through the negative lens of past experience.**
* **Failing to embed mission, values, commitments, and goals into the day-to-day culture of the district or school.**
* **Failing to confront behavior that is incongruent with collaboratively developed vision and commitments.**
* **An incongruence between what people profess they believe and value vs. what they do.**

***Things to Do***

* **Mission: develop a clear understanding of our core purpose**
* **Vision: describe the district or school we hope to become—what would it look like, sound like, be like *if we really mean it?***
* **Collective commitments: articulate attitudes, behaviors, and commitments we must demonstrate to advance our vision.**
* **Goals: determine first steps, short-term achievable goals, and long-term stretch goals.**
* **Align resource allocation, particularly time and money with our mission.**
* **Embed high levels of learning for all within each school and district office as the core mission.**
* **Develop goals in a learning improvement plan.**
* **Monitor not only the quality of learning improvement plans but also the results.**

**November**

***Align district/school policies, practices, and procedures with the learning mission.***

**We must filter all decisions, policies, practices, and procedures through the lens of “*What will be the probably impact on learning*?**

* **Develop an action plan.**
* **Communicate priorities through:**
* **Developing systematic procedures**
* **Monitoring**
* **Modeling**
* **Asking the right questions**
* **Allocating resources to support the learning mission**
* **Celebrating**
* **Confronting**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Disconnect between policies, practices, and procedures and the mission of ensuring *learning for all.***
* **Disjointed incrementalism—just tinkering year after year, adding this, adding that, and never examining the system as a whole.**
* **Not paying enough attention to details—especially practices and procedures.**

***Things to Do***

* **Develop an action plan.**
* **Communicate priorities**
* **Develop systematic procedures.**
* **Monitor high priority indicators.**
* **Model collective commitments.**
* **Ask the right questions.**
* **Allocate resources to support the learning mission.**
* **Celebrate behavior reflecting your purpose.**
* **Confront behavior incongruent with your purpose or commitments.**
* **Review major policies and procedures in light of our mission.**
* **Revamp our administrator evaluation program**
* **Observe whether comments and goals in staff evaluation reflects our values**
* **Overhaul recruiting and induction**

**DECEMBER**

***Build collaborative teams that focus on learning.***

**“Interdependence is what organizations are all about. Productivity, performance, and innovation result from *joint* action, not just individual efforts and behavior.” Pfeffer & Sutton**

* ***Embed collaboration into the routine practices of the district/school.***
* ***Provide time for teams to collaborate.***
* ***Maintain team focus on the critical questions of learning.***
* ***Clarify the products that teams will be expected to generate.***
* ***Establish the norms of collaboration.***
* ***Ensure team members work interdependently to achieve common SMART goals, for which they are mutually accountable.***
* ***Engage in ongoing collective inquiry into best practice and current reality.***

***Possible Bumps***

* **Failure to adequately articulate what high performing collaborative teams do and what products they will be expected to produce.**
* **Allowing individuals to opt out of being a contributing member of a collaborative team.**
* **Not adequately addressing the issue of the singletons.**
* **Failure to provide training, directions, clarity, examples, and resources.**
* **Failure to provide time within the school day for teams to meet**
* **Expectations—Acceptance Gap: Failure to monitor the quality of the work of teams—a willingness to accept work of far less quality than we expect.**

***Things to Do***

* **Embed collaboration into the routine practices of the district or school.**
* **Provide time for teams to collaborate.**
* **Maintain team focus on the critical questions of learning.**
* **Clarify products teams will be expected to generate.**
* **Establish norms of collaboration.**
* **Ensure members of teams work interdependently to achieve common goals.**
* **Develop SMART goals, for which they are mutually accountable.**
* **Engage in ongoing collective inquiry into best practice and current reality.**
* **Craft a written plan that guides the work of the team.**
* **Provide training in high performing teaming**
* **Monitor the quality of collaborative analysis of student learning by teams**
* **Monitor the progress related to the plan**

**JANUARY**

***FOCUS ON LEARNING.***

**“Great organizations simplify a complex world into a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything.” Jim Collins**

**Unifying the idea of a professional learning community is an intense and persistent focus on learning.**

* **All teams will:**
* **Clarify what each student is expected to learn—the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions—or each course or subject, unit-by-unit**
* **Monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis through the use of frequent, formative common assessments**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Failure to monitor the quality of products produced by teams such as pacing guides and common assessments**
* **Failure to see the importance of both horizontal and vertical curriculum mapping**
* **Adding to rather than reducing content (failure to identify “Essential Outcomes of Power Standards”)**
* **No monitoring plan to ensure the planned curriculum is taught and learned**

***Things to Do***

* **Teams should clarify what each student is expected to learn—the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions—from each course or subject, unit-by-unit**
* **Teams should monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis through the use of frequent, formative common assessments.**
* **Provide each team with examples of excellent pacing guides and common assessments**
* **Give clear directions**
* **Make time within the school day for teams to do their work**
* **Support appropriate training**
* **Provide feedback regarding the quality of each team’s work**

**FEBRUARY**

***Set aside systematic time and support for learning (intervention and enrichment).***

**Lezotte has observed that one of the ways to assess the degree to which schools can be characterized as having a culture of high expectations is to examine what happens when some kids do not learn.**

* **Identify students who need additional time and support or enrichment.**
* **Create systems to ensure students receive additional time and support if they are not learning.**
* **Provide timely intervention rather than sluggish remediation.**
* ***Direct* rather than invitestudents to participate in intervention.**
* ***Create systems to ensure students receive additional time and support according to a school wide plan rather than the discretion of individual teachers.***
* ***Create systems to ensure students receive enrichment and extension when they are proficient.***

***Possible Bumps***

* **Master schedule is a barrier to kids receiving additional time and support.**
* **Decisions about additional time and support are left up to individual teachers.**
* **There is no plan for what to do during intervention time.**
* **No one monitors the success of interventions.**
* **Leaders don’t address the “some kids just fail” attitude.**

***Things to Do***

* **Identify students who need additional time and support for enrichment.**
* **Make sure everyone is clear on why certain kids get additional time and support—and what that support looks like.**
* **Embed time, support, and enrichment in the school day.**
* **Make sure time, support, and enrichment are timely, systematic, and directional rather that invitational.**
* **Create a written plan school by school that addresses how students receive additional time, support and enrichment.]**
* **Seek out how others provide time, support, and enrichment.**
* **Embed additional time, support, and enrichment within the school day.**
* **Monitor the effectiveness of each plan.**
* **Distinguish the difference between pyramids of intervention and RTI**

**MARCH**

***Focus on results to inform and improve professional practice.***

**“The challenge for schools is to provide each teacher with powerful and authentic information in a timely manner in order to impact his or her professional practice in ways that enhance student learning.”**

**DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many**

* **Inform and improve professional practice for each member.**
* **Identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning.**
* **Share effective instructional practices.**
* **Support members as they implement more effective practices.**
* **Gather new data to assess the impact of new practices.**
* **Identify professional development needs.**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Focusing on intentions rather than results.**
* **Emphasizing areas that have little effect on learning.**
* **Focusing on results in a punitive rather than helpful way.**
* **Failing to recognize small, but important improvements.**

***Things to Do***

* **Inform and improve the professional practice of each team member.**
* **Identify strengths and weaknesses of student learning.**
* **Have each team develop SMART goals.**
* **Share instructional practices among team members.**
* **Get team members to try new approaches.**
* **Have teams gather new data to assess effectiveness of new practices.**
* **Identify professional development needs.**
* **Provide a process to analyze student work.**
* **Set SMART goals based on collaborative analysis of student learning.**
* **Share effective instructional practices among team members.**
* **Analyze effects of team members’ new practices.**
* **Plan professional development activities based on student performance data and needs of instructional staff.**

**APRIL**

***Facilitate adult learning.***

**A professional learning community is a way of thinking to increase learning levels of all students—*and adults.***

* **Provide staff with the training, support and resources to implement best practice.**
* **Ensure that staff development is linked to student learning goals.**
* **Foster ongoing job-embedded learning into every position.**
* **Create systems for frequent and public recognition of improvement—individually and**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Simply averaging opinions rather than seeking out best practices.**
* **Failing to provide teams with relevant examples of best practices.**
* **Failing to recognize the importance of job-embedded learning.**
* **Failing to include the support staff as part of the professional learning community process.**

***Things to Do***

* **Emphasize gaining shared knowledge as the first step as teams plan for improvement.**
* **Provide training, resources, and support for implementing best practices.**
* **Ensure staff development linked to student learning goals.**
* **Foster organized, job-embedded learning for *every* position.**
* **Make job-embedded staff development a critical aspect of the MCPS culture.**
* **Insist that teams gain shared knowledge as a first step for improvement planning.**
* **Provide staff development activities to expose teams to best practices.**
* **Include the support staff in the adult learning process.**

**MAY**

***Strive for continuous improvement.***

**Becoming a professional learning community is a journey, not a destination. You never arrive!**

**“In a professional learning community, educators are hungry for evidence of student learning. Relevant, timely information is the essential fuel of their continuous improvement process.”**

**DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006**

* **Establish SMART goals to drive the work of teams**
* **Align team goals with school goals and school goals with district goals.**
* **Ensure every individual receives frequent and timely feedback on the level of his or her effectiveness compared to other members of his or her team.**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Illusion of motion.**
* **Inefficient data tool.**
* **“Results, then what?” swirls around the classroom.**
* **Resistance to owning data.**
* **Fear that results will be used against individual staff members.**
* **Belief that state assessment results are the only ones that matter.**
* **Failure to develop improvement goals.**
* **Failure to monitor the goals or any improvement plan.**
* **Failure to include the support staff.**
* **Failure to provide performance feedback.**

***Things to Do***

* **Use feedback on results to inform not punish.**
* **Establish SMART goals to drive the work of the teams.**
* **Align team goals with school goals and school goals with district goals.**
* **Compare apples to apples.**
* **Ensure that teachers and principals do the work of data analysis.**
* **Give each individual frequent and timely feedback about his/her effectiveness.**
* **Remember that fixating on results does not mean inattention to the needs of students and adults.**
* **Provide specific time to analyze assessment data and student work.**
* **Train teams to analyze data and student work—reflective practice.**
* **Use results to inform professional practice vs. evaluation process.**
* **Embed SMART goal development and review into the entire district culture.**
* **Begin the process of investigating more efficient reporting tools.**

**JUNE**

***Celebration!***

**“In the absence of rituals, ceremonies, and celebration, important values will lose all meaning.” Terrence Deal**

* **Celebrate your progress in the plc journey**

***Possible Bumps***

* **Failure to celebrate improvement.**
* **Celebration too rarely tied to student learning progress.**
* **Celebration too infrequent.**
* **Failure to publically recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of individuals.**
* **Failure to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of adults—including support staff and parent/community volunteers.**

***Things to Do***

* **Make sure frequent and timely celebration becomes a planned part of the district, school, and classroom culture.**
* **Focus on improvement as well as the attainment of a predetermined standard.**
* **Celebrate accomplishments of individuals as well as groups.**
* **Ensure that schools, teams, and teachers plan for celebration.**
* **Make celebration part of each learning improvement plan.**
* **Celebrate improvement individually and collectively.**
* **Make sure we celebrate the right things—especially improvement in student learning.**

**It is unrealistic to think that you can reculture a school or school district into a professional learning community without experiencing a few bumps in the road.**

**The issue is how we deal with them, not how we avoid them.**

**“PLCs shift the focus of their school improvement efforts from the supervision and evaoluation of individual teachers to an emphasis on building the capacity of collaborative teams of teachers to take responsibility for their own learning.”**

**Richard DuFour**

**Differentiated Leadership**

**“…there is no *one* effective leadership style. Rather, leaders need to be skilled in a *wide variety* of leadership behaviors if they are to work effectively with the broad range of *individuals, teams and situations* that occur in the daily, complex world of a school district.”**

**Eaker and Keating**

**Reciprocal Responsibility**

* **Empower**
* **Recognize**
* **Listen**
* **Ownership creates responsibility for the achievement of the goal**
* **Success creates recognition for all**
* **Collins—*Good to Great*: “Set up successors for success.”**

**Focus on the Goal**

* **Stay the course**
* **Have courage to do what’s right**

**Leadership Advice for Effective Principals**

* **Be clear about our primary responsibility**
* **Disperse leadership throughout the school**
* **Align the structure and culture of the school with its core purpose**

***Revisiting PLCs, p. 308***

***DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker***

***Principals in PLCs Disperse Leadership***

**“The principal should develop capacity of people throughout the school to assume leadership roles and view himself or herself as a leader of leaders.”**

**Revisiting PLC’s p. 310**

**DuFour, DuFour & Eaker**

**Tight and Loose Leadership**

**Clear expectations….**

* **Norms**
* **Power Standards**
* **Scope and sequence/pacing guides**
* **Common formative and summative assessments**
* **Item analysis of MontCAS**
* **Additional time and support**